



Lincoln and American Values Symposium

Introduction and Welcoming Remarks

September 20, 2008

On September 20, 2008, the Center for the National Archives Experience celebrated the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth with a daylong symposium, *Lincoln and American Values*. The symposium provided historical insight into some of the most critically important facets of Lincoln's Presidency.

Allen Weinstein, Archivist of the United States, **Marvin Pinkert**; Executive Director of the National Archives Experience, and **Harold Holzer**, Co-Chairman, Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and author of *Lincoln at Cooper Union* offer an introduction and welcoming remarks.

MARVIN PINKERT: Good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

PINKERT: Good morning. Welcome to the William G. McGowan Theater at the National Archives. I'm Marvin Pinkert, Director of the National Archives Experience, and I am awed to be here among so many great scholars of Abraham Lincoln's life and work. I'm also thrilled to be here in an SRO hall of people who really love Abraham Lincoln. This week, we made an announcement about an upcoming exhibit project, and they've let me come to the podium for a few minutes to talk to this very special audience about it. My team has just completed the first stage of design for a major traveling exhibit called "Discovering the Civil War" that will open in two parts in our O'Brien Gallery in 2010 and travel across the country during the key sesquicentennial years of the Civil War.

The exhibit project, like today's symposium, is part of the National Archives' ongoing efforts to advance civic literacy on a national scale and to make the public more aware of the discoveries that are possible in the rich trove of records that we hold, and, like today's program, the symposium--the Foundation for the National Archives, our public/private



partner, will be providing underwriting for this project with the help of people like you. The exhibit is unconventional in every way. It is thematic rather than chronological. Rather than follow the story arc from Sumter to Appomattox, it deals with topics like how do you raise an army, how do you find leaders, what happens after a battle, and what was the global impact of the war.

The topics take us into territory that's rarely commemorated by a monument or marker. It will be designed to be appealing to visitors who like spies or gadgets or romance novels as well as those who have a deep interest in military history. Our goal for the sesquicentennial, to borrow a phrase from University of Richmond president Ed Ayers, is to make the Civil War strange again and to actively engage visitors in the act of exploring unfamiliar terrain. Our model is the Public Vaults exhibit upstairs, where we combine great originals, compelling interactives, and a physical environment that promotes discovery. How many people here have seen the Public Vaults?

OK.

For the rest of you, you're allowed to go up there during lunch break, but you've got to be back here by 1:30 because we're starting the second half at 1:30 sharp. I want to offer just a few examples of the types of records and stories we will turn into exhibit units for this traveling show. Since we aren't going to begin our story at Sumter, the first debate was about where to start. As holders of the Charters of Freedom, it seemed logical to begin at Independence Hall, but, no, we're not there on the day the Declaration was signed without that paragraph condemning King George for his enslavement of Africans, and, no, we're not there on that day that the Constitution is written proclaiming that some humans are to be counted as 3/5 of a person. No. We're there 75 years later on the second floor, where a federal court is conducting the largest treason trial in American history. The rebels on trial do not come from South Carolina or from Missouri, but from Christiana, Pennsylvania. When slave owners crossed the border from Maryland to get federal marshals to recover their lost property, Quakers that had sheltered former slaves gave the refugees farm implements and a few muskets to resist their former masters. Daniel Webster thought it would be a good idea to put the Quakers on trial for treason to discourage other violators of the Fugitive Slave Act. So, there's a chapter people aren't familiar with. Here you see the context in which such a complex story might be told. The interactive touch screen that you see in front of you, a huge interactive touch screen, has a current of records, hundreds of records, flowing along the top. When a visitor puts a facsimile of one of the Christiana records on the target that you see marked, a half-dozen related records drop down from the current. The visitor follows the clues, piecing together the puzzle by moving from record to record. In this manner, visitors can explore the whole story all the way from eyewitness reports to the final acquittal.

Go ahead.



Sometimes a single original can deliver its own powerful discoveries. Here the women of Philadelphia Arsenal petition their government because the company the government outsourced their arsenal to has now cut their wages, and now these seamstresses ask, "With our husbands in the army, how will we survive?" Good thing nothing like that ever happens today.

Next stop.

The final example I wanted to share illustrates our goal of having visitors walk in the shoes of real researchers. In this case, we'll let them follow the path of a real curator who ran across this odd notation on the outside sleeve of a record from Missouri. "Report of the execution of 6 rebel soldiers held as hostages for Major Wolf." This inspired a fair amount of curiosity since none of us recalled reading much in our high-school history books about the Union executing hostages, but--let's face it--the whole war in Missouri never made it to the high-school history books. It appears that a guerrilla commander named Reeves captured and executed 6 Union soldiers, including a certain Major Wilson. Not being able to find Reeves, the Union commander shot 6 captured Confederates, instead, but that wasn't the end of the story. There was no officer among those the Union had executed, so retribution was considered incomplete. The call went out that the next captured Confederate major should be put to death. The lucky candidate was Major Wolf, who here describes being dragged from his cell, chained to an anvil, and being told that in one week, he would be executed. Somehow, word leaked out to the local populace.

A group of concerned neighbors, describing themselves as "loyal citizens of the Union," felt this act of vengeance was a travesty of justice. On the day before the sentence was to be carried out, they sent a telegram to the only man they thought could help, and within 24 hours, President Lincoln responded, thanks to the high-tech communication available through the telegraph, ordering the general in charge to stay the execution. Besides being a great illustration of today's theme of Lincoln's influence on American values, I think this story demonstrates the ability of records and the effective display of records to get the public to think anew and to question received wisdom. Many brave men died in the great battles of the Civil War, but when we understand the way the world looked not only in the telegraph office of the War Department, but also in Pilot Knob, Missouri, then just maybe it ceases to be a blur of strategies and tactics and starts to become something we want to investigate ourselves, and that's what we hope visitors will feel when they come to experience our new exhibit.

So, I appreciate your patience for my enthusiasm. I couldn't picture a more important audience to share our progress with, and my team would welcome your feedback on this project. We'll be around in breaks and at lunch.



I want to introduce Chris Smith and Bruce Bustard. Chris, Bruce, if you would stand, easy to spot Bruce. Chris, I think, is back on this side. Any of the 3 of us would welcome your comments.

Now I return you to today's meeting without further commercial interruption, and let me welcome to the podium the man who was responsible for this exhibit and all our educational ventures and has made them all possible, the ninth Archivist of the United States--Allen Weinstein.

[Applause]

ALLEN WEINSTEIN: Any week that begins with Jim McPherson gracing our presence and ends with this extraordinary panel of scholars can't be all bad. In fact, it's all good. We thank you all for being here. I'm going to tell a story, a brief story, before I go any further because it gets to the heart of what you just listened to with Marvin. You listened to a perception on the part of Marvin and others here--all of us, in fact--that we must dream the Civil War. We must imagine it. We must reconstruct it new. We must make it new, particularly for those who want to understand it, as we try to. A few months after I became Archivist 4 years ago--it's almost 4 years ago--I was on a platform like this, and I was introduced as the Alchemist of the United States.

[Laughter]

Well, I didn't know what to do at that point, but--I didn't--but in time, I learned, and when I was at a meeting fairly recently of the Council of State Archivists, I was given a present for future introductions of this kind. [Whoosh]

[Laughter]

[Whoosh]

But that's what you've just seen on the screen in "Rediscovering the Civil War." That's our imagination at work in this process, and I hope you'll help us. OK. To today's business. - Good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

WEINSTEIN: That's not good enough. Good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.



WEINSTEIN: Better. And welcome to the National Archives and to the William G. McGowan Theater. Today's program inaugurates a series of programs observing the bicentennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln in 1809. This is not the first time a group of distinguished scholars has assembled to discuss our 16th President in these quarters. In fact, the National Archives has hosted several Lincoln symposia in the past. Although Lincoln served as President nearly a century and a half ago, he still commands the rapt attention of more historians, writers, and journalists who study his life, analyze his actions, debate his legacy, than, arguably, any other President. The public remains as curious about Lincoln as ever before.

You need look no further than the tremendous success a few years ago of Doris Kearns Goodwin's "Team of Rivals." Today we seek further insight into the character of the man and the significance of his actions by asking, for example, how did this one-time railroad lawyer and one-term congressman, one-term congressman, develop the political and other skills that helped him rise to the Presidency and preside over a nation at war with itself? How?

What did Lincoln intend with the Emancipation Proclamation? Why is it, in some ways, still puzzling to us? How did Lincoln view the Constitution? His Presidential powers, he pushed to the limit during the Civil War. As one of the nation's most involved wartime Presidents, how did Lincoln perform as Commander-In-Chief plotting strategic moves with his generals in the war zones? All of these questions and others will be among those explored today. Happy to report that today's program has the support of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, and I want to thank the Foundation for the National Archives for its generous funding support. The President of the Foundation, current President, Tom Wheeler, future President Ken Lore are both here. I wonder if you would stand, both of you, so we can thank you properly.

[Applause]

Now Wheeler is putting on his historian hat, so don't be surprised when you see him on the platform a little bit later. Looking forward to that. I particularly want, also, to recognize Budge and Russ Weidman--dear friends, scholars in their own right who are so responsible for what we're doing today, the most dedicated volunteers--

[Applause]

The most dedicated volunteers, arguably, that we've ever had at the National Archives. Budge first suggested today's program as well as the speakers you'll hear. They have followed this. They have tracked it. They have been devoted to it, and where are they? All right. Come on. Stand up.



[Applause]

I'm sorry to say that our friend and colleague Lonnie Bunch-- Director of the National Museum of African-American History and Culture, who'd plan to share the welcoming remarks with me--has had to send his regrets, as he will be attending a funeral this morning. I would also like to thank before finishing with the thank-yous those who have been responsible for implementing the National Archives Experience, beginning with Marvin Pinkert. Marvin, where'd you go? Right. Stand up, Marvin. That lets us--

[Applause]

And Marvin has quite a team, quite a team. Maria Carosa Stanwich, who is in charge of-- Is Maria here?

PINKERT: Way at the top.

WEINSTEIN: Way at the top? Where at the top? Oh.

[Applause]

You've seen Susan Clifton running around. Where's Susan? Is she here?

[Applause]

And I could go on. There are a whole bunch of wonderful folks, wonderful folks. OK.

As you all know, one of the more intriguing aspects of studying today's subject is tracking the evolution of Lincoln's complex thought over the years. One example of many that I fished out but I'm only gonna use the one, in an 1848 speech made in the House of Representatives, we have this early Lincolnian commentary on the right of secession, The right of secession. Quote, "Any people anywhere being inclined "and having the power have the right to rise up "and shake off the existing government "and form a new one that suits them better. "This is a most valuable, a sacred right, "a right which we hope and believe "is to liberate the world." That's not John C. Calhoun. That's not Jefferson Davis talking. That's Abraham Lincoln. So, I leave you this morning, begin this program with the complexities, the conundrum of Abraham Lincoln, if you will, who wrestled throughout his political career with the dilemma of how best to achieve conflicting goals, what appeared to be conflicting goals--preservation of the Union on one hand, prevention of slavery's continued expansion on the other--a President who, throughout his Presidency, was compelled to ask himself the most profoundly existential of questions about the future of the Union, and let me give you perhaps one of the most existential formulations of all in closing. It's the formula found in Henry Adams' "Education of Henry Adams."



How many of you have read "The Education of Henry Adams"? Just...1, 2, 3. It's the most important book written by an American about this country, and nobody reads it, except those of you who go out now and, I hope, buy a copy, and here's Adams talking about the Lincolnian dilemma that I'm talking about. This Abraham Lincoln arrives in Washington. He's been elected President. He has to sneak into town, as you know... and this is Adams. "The picture of Washington in March 1861 offered education, "but not the kind of education that led to good. "The process that Matthew Arnold described as "wandering between two worlds, "one dead, the other powerless to be born" "helps nothing. "Washington was a dismal school. "Even before the traders had flown, "the vultures had descended on it "in swarms that darkened the ground "and tore the carrion of political patronage "into fragments and gobbets of lean and fat "on the very steps of the White House. "Not a man there knew what his work was to be "or was fitted for it. "Everyone, without exception, Northern or Southern, "was to learn his business at the cost of the public. "Lincoln, Seward, Sumner, and the rest "could give no help to the young man seeking education. "They knew less than he. "Within 6 weeks, they were all to be taught their duties "by the uprising of such as he, "and their education was to cost a million lives "and \$10,000 million, more or less, North and South, "before the country could recover "its balance and movement. "Henry as a helpless victim, "and, like all the rest, he could only wait "for he knew not what to send him he knew not where." Aren't we lucky that we don't have anything like that in Washington today? Thank you very much. Have a good day.

[Applause]

Don't worry. No more sesquicentennial. I'm now the bicentennial man. When we learned that today's symposium would be among the first endorsed events of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, we were very proud, and giving us even greater satisfaction was the fact that the co-chair of that commission, Dr. Harold Holzer, had agreed to be a presenter at this event and the moderator of our first panel. If I detailed Dr. Holzer's full vita, we would have to cancel the first panel, so let me offer just a couple of highlights. He's the author, coauthor, or editor of 30 books on Lincoln and the Civil War and has not one, but two more books on the way-- "Lincoln President-Elect," coming this fall, and "Lincoln In American Memory," coming in February. In between these books and more than 300 articles, Dr. Holzer has helped provide historical insight for C-SPAN, PBS, and the History Channel, among others, extending the knowledge of the 16th President to a broad and appreciative public. Ladies and gentlemen, let me ask you to welcome Dr. Harold Holzer.

[Applause]

HAROLD HOLZER: Thank you. Good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.



HOLZER: This is working very well. I just told Marvin I actually have 3 books coming out, not 2.

[Laughter]

The third one is called "In Lincoln's Hand." It's the catalog that will accompany the Library of Congress-- am I allowed to say, "Library of Congress" here?-- Library of Congress' bicentennial exhibition. It's great Lincoln documents with commentary by distinguished American authors and political leaders, including all 4 living Presidents, so that should be interesting. Anyway, on behalf of my Lincoln Bicentennial co-chairs, Senator Richard Durbin and Congressman Ray LaHood, and our extraordinarily hard-working Executive Director, who is here today and I'd like her to stand up, Eileen Mackevich...

[Applause]

I want to thank the same roster that the Archivist thanked-- Susan Clifton and Budge and Russ Weidman and all of those who made this possible and especially to thank Dr. Weinstein. I mean, I know we're here to discuss an American hero, but in terms of preservation and truth, Dr. Weinstein is an American hero, as well. Thank you.

[Applause]

We're actually gathered here virtually on the eve of the 146th anniversary of one of America's most treasured archives. You'll forgive me if I mention that it's one that's preserved in New York State the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, and we are gathered, as well, in a very real sense, to launch the new fall season of Lincoln bicentennial activities. Today's symposium, which has attracted such a fine audience and a wonderful roster of historians and panelists, sets the table for what we hope will be a memorable year-long bicentennial celebration. We hope to involve history enthusiasts, lifelong learners, young students, new citizens, white Americans, African-Americans across all line of origin and interest, political persuasion as we work to remind ourselves about just what keeps us all so distinct but also keeps us united. Lincoln plays such a major role in that conversation--the one figure from history who seems so modern and relevant, a man whose can-do ambition defined the American Dream and whose soaring rhetoric enriches the American vocabulary--but a crucial part of that legacy-- all too often overlooked, I might add-- are the documents and the laws that forged this democracy on which Lincoln based his entire political life and which are so faithfully and lovingly enshrined in this building. One of the leaders for whom I once worked, Governor Mario Cuomo, once said that often the poetry of oratory obscures the prose of government.

Today we're going to examine the prose. I suspect it will be as enriching, informative, and thought-provoking as Lincoln himself regarded it. Before we do, I was asked briefly to relate some bicentennial plans and highlights, and I can tell you, of course, that you can



expect major observations and celebrations on February 12--a joint session of Congress with important personalities reading about and from Lincoln and not in the current House chamber, by the way, which was built after Lincoln served his one term there and where the 150th Lincoln celebration took place, but rather in Statuary Hall, where the old House chamber existed and where Congressman Lincoln watched during his one term in frustration as the slavery debate was strangled, unable to be voiced, and watched that especially frustrated old champion of freedom John Quincy Adams die, practically on the floor of the House. Lincoln was there. Also on February 12, a national teaching, a wreath-laying ceremony at the Lincoln Memorial, and who knows what a new President will want to do himself. Whatever the outcome, we know for certain a few things already, among them that the next President will be a United States Senator, will write left-handed, and will be an admirer of Abraham Lincoln.

[Laughter]

In that, we are very fortunate, just as I feel so fortunate to be here. You know, the last time I was at the National Archives to do a presentation, I had barely left when this room was filled with about 20 feet of water, and in the years since, every time I call Susan or her predecessors to propose a program, for some reason, they would say, "I'm sorry. "I can't hear on this connection." They would hang up. So, I guess the statute of limitations has run out. In the months to come, we'll also celebrate the opening of major Lincoln exhibitions all across the country.

Here in Washington, we'll also see the reopening of Ford's Theater and its renovated museum; the minting of brand-new copper pennies, the designs for which the U.S. Mint and the commission will announce on Monday on the Mall; new postage stamps; new history curricula for teachers at all grade levels on the web; a concert on the Mall in the spring; symposia like this one from coast to coast and beyond, really-- from California to London, Paris, and Belfast, many points in between, from Howard University to Harvard University, at the Lincoln Forum and at other Lincoln groups, and in every state where Lincoln lived and worked. There will be town hall meetings, new ceremonies at Gettysburg, at least two television documentaries on PBS and the History Channel, and gavel-to-gavel coverage of signature events along with monthly weekend specials from the network of the Lincoln bicentennial--C-SPAN. Eventually, there will be, I'm assured, a Steven Spielberg movie, as well.

[Laughter]

He marches to his own drummer, and the bicentennial peg is not as important to him as it is to us, but it will happen, I'm sure, and to be gracious to the competition, some 60 new Lincoln books in the next year and a half, which is an embarrassment of riches? No. It's a wonderful library full of new treasures, and it's really going to be extraordinary. I'm really



delighted and somewhat envious that my good friend Craig Simon, who is the first person with a brand-new book, he may have carried them all here today, but they're here.

[Laughter]

For those of you who don't know, on Monday at 6 P.M.--7 P.M.--the National Endowment for the Arts and chairman Dana Gioia will host a poetry event at the Department of the Interior featuring poets like former Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky, young poets, actors Joan Allen and Sam Waterston reading poetry Lincoln wrote, poetry Lincoln loved, and poetry by Edwin Markham, Walt Whitman, and Carl Sandburg and others who have written about Lincoln, so I hope some of you might want to come to that event, as well, and I've only touched the surface. Hopefully, we'll create both deep impressions and lasting memories.

As Lincoln said in 1862, "We cannot escape history," so I think he would be glad to know that here at the National Archives and throughout the capital and throughout the country, we are resolved to embrace history as we begin this Lincoln bicentennial year and that those of us here this morning pledge ourselves to remain committed to using the lessons of the past to light the way to the future. Thank you.

[Applause]

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